



## Sailing better in light airs

Downwind and light-airs sails aren't just for racers. On a quiet day they can get you to your destination faster than an engine, with a lot more fun. **Andy Cross** of Crusader Sails answers some typical questions from cruising sailors

**Q.** I have a 38ft cruising yacht which my partner and I usually sail two-up. Our standard main and genoa are fine in force 3-4 upwards, but I'm looking for a sail which will perform better in lighter winds. What are my options?

**A.** With modern materials there's a much wider range of options available. Remember, when you're sailing downwind the apparent wind is always lighter (true wind minus boat speed) so you can use much lighter fabrics than for your genoa. Are you comfortable with using a spinnaker pole?

**Q.** With just two of us on board I'd prefer to keep things simple and safe. I'm not planning any racing! I just want a sail which is easy to set and also easy to remove if the wind strengthens.

**A.** If you just want a sail for downwind work, a sensible and popular option is a cruising chute. Basically it's a slightly de-tuned asymmetric spinnaker. It doesn't need a pole, which minimises trimming and simplifies handling, but it can give a serious boost to downwind speed and fun. Various handling options make it easy to set and furl from the cockpit.

**Q.** That sounds good, can I get it ready to go before we leave harbour?

**A.** You can't leave a cruising chute rigged because it has no protection from UV light, so as soon as it is lowered it needs to be stowed away. If you want a light wind sail which can be ready to go at any time, a better option is a cruising version of a Code Zero sail.

**Q.** Hmm, I have heard about Code Zero, but isn't that a racing sail? I have a limited budget!

**A.** The Code Zero was developed for the Whitbread Round the World boats as a free-flying, large laminate sail, like a very big genoa designed for close reaching. You're quite right that you wouldn't want one of those. But it turns out that a version which is adapted for cruising use is actually a very flexible sail which can be used both upwind and downwind in winds up to force 3-4. The version made by Crusader Sails, made of lightweight laminate material, is called the Super Zero and it's designed for longevity as a cruising sail, with UV protection from a sacrificial sun cover. You can set it rolled up in the dock and leave it on the front of the boat, although you wouldn't hoist it in April and leave it until September!

**Q.** Is it a huge sail? Won't it be difficult to handle?

**A.** Foresails are measured in percentages. Roughly, a 100% sail goes back as far as the mast. The Super Zero is a 165% sail, which is big but not ridiculously huge, and you can carry it up to a sensible wind speed, say 10-12 knots. It has a high clew, so you can see underneath it, and the sheets (or just one sheet, which I prefer) can come to the back of the boat – many people attach a block to a stern mooring cleat, you don't need a special track. But the key point is that you can furl it like a standard foresail, on its own drum with a furling line led aft.

**Q.** On our previous boat we had a big 140% genoa, although to be honest we often had it partly furled. What is the difference between that and the Super Zero?

**A.** Your old genoa would be made of a heavy cloth with an even heavier UV strip. It would never perform as well in light airs as a 21st century sail with an especially-designed cut and lightweight laminate material. More modern boats have much smaller headsails, perhaps even self-tacking, and for them the Super Zero will provide an even bigger boost in light wind performance.

**Q.** What would I need to rig a Super Zero?

**A.** First of all, a spinnaker halyard, which most boats have anyway, but you need to make sure it's not too stretchy – it doesn't have to be Dyneema, but a modern low-stretch line. The forestay doesn't support the sail in this case, so the halyard is doing the work. You need sheets, although you don't necessarily need to rig both a windward and leeward sheet, just tie off the one that's not in use. There's no need for a metal snap shackle, a bowline is safer and just as strong.

At the foot of the Super Zero, the drum of the reefing system needs to be attached to a strong point which is at least 350mm forward of the existing foresail, so that they clear each other in use. On newer yachts with step-through pulpits this is usually possible. On older-style boats you may need to rig a bowsprit, bearing in mind that this is carrying a big sail with a lot of wind in it, so the bowsprit can't be a broom handle or a boathook. We stock Seldén retractable bowsprit kits in aluminium or carbon fibre, but on a bigger boat you would need fabricated stainless steel. Of course the fixing also needs to be clear of the anchor.

When you rig the sail, you attach the foot to the strong point on your pre-prepared bowsprit and the halyard to the top swivel, and haul it up. The endless line from the drum furling system is led back via stanchion-mounted guides to a double tandem block at the cockpit end, where it is locked off.

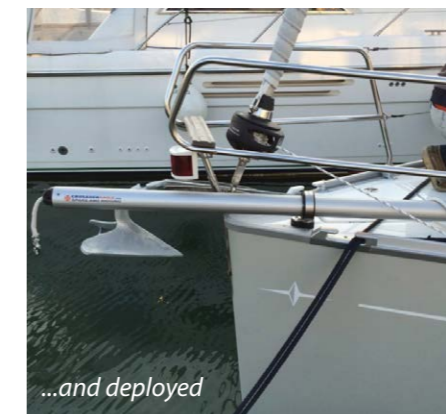
**Q.** Let's say I have bought all this kit, rigged the sail in the marina and headed into open water. It's a lovely day with a Force 2-3 and calm seas. What do I do next? Will it be worth it?

**A.** Raise the main as usual, then release the furling line on the Super Zero. Don't let it surge out in one go, as that puts a lot of strain on the rig – release it gradually. Sheet in at the back to get the wind into the sail. Then come on to your course.

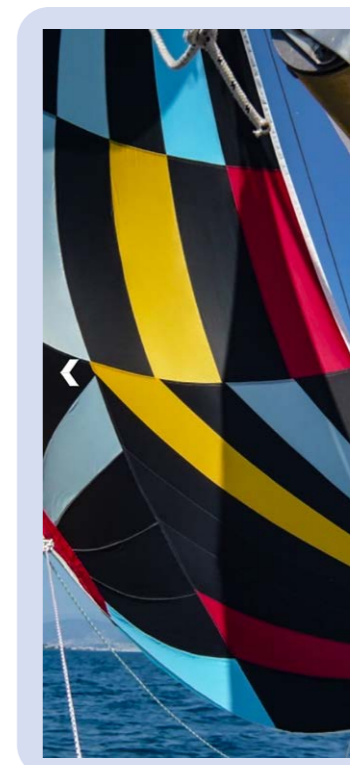
Some people do have both a Super Zero and a cruising chute



Seldén bowsprit retracted...



...and deployed



### Making a chute more manageable

If you already have an asymmetric spinnaker or cruising chute in your sail locker but just want to make it easier to handle, there are a number of other options. The Crusader "Magic Furl" system, similar to the furler fitted on the Super Zero sails, uses custom hardware with Torlon bearings, high tech torque rope and a twin grab-line system, and can be fitted to any size of existing sail. A squeezer or snuffer is also an option for any downwind sail.

in their sail locker, because the Zero is not a true downwind sail. It will do a pretty good job downwind, but you may be better off dropping the main. You'll still be safer and more stable than goose-winging with a main and foresail.

Remember, your sails are really wings – more like glider wings than the ones on a Eurofighter. Lift is what you need, and that comes from airflow across from the luff to the leech. If you over-sheet that causes stalling; you don't fall out of the sky but you do heel right over, which is inefficient. When you have two sails, you're like a biplane, and the key thing is the airflow around the outside and the gap between the sails.

Let the boat talk to you, and remember what it says! It might be worth noting the boat speed, wind speed and sailing angle for a range of situations. Then you will know if you're doing something wrong, and when you should be going faster.

**Q.** On my imaginary cruise, other boats are heeling right over and the wind is strengthening. How do I furl my new sail without dropping it into the sea? Do I need a snuffer?

**A.** With a tiny weight on the sheet so that the sail is not too slack, just pull on the furling line. If there's too much wind in the sail bear away a bit. There is a small piece of Velcro to hold the sail in place, but if conditions are gusty it's best to get the Zero off the foredeck. Otherwise it can be left in place and stowed later.

### Win a Super Zero worth over £2000

Crusader Sails is sponsoring our exclusive-to-members Big Winter Prize Draw. For more details and to find out how to enter, see page 11.

#### CA member discount

Crusader Sails offers CA members a 20% discount on new sails and 15% off sail repairs, furlers and reefing systems. Find the code to claim the offer on the members' discounts page of the CA website.

Andy Cross has been sales manager of Crusader Sails since 1984. He started sailing in a Twister in 1971, and his logbook includes *Sir Winston Churchill*, *Malcolm Miller*, the Whitbread racer *Norsk Data*, plus half- and three-quarter tonners which he has raced successfully. Andy is an expert on sails, masts and reefing gear.

